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ABSTRACT

In an effort to inform program assessment efforts and provide more accurate indicators of student outcomes, Harrisburg Area Community College (HACC), in Pennsylvania, conducted a study of student educational objectives. Responses to questions related to goals on the college registration form were analyzed for 9,927 students enrolling in spring 1994 and data were compiled for the sample regarding gender, race, age, campus, degree status, major, and credits taken. Study findings included the following: (1) 55.1% of the sample indicated they wanted to complete courses to earn a degree, 31% to transfer without earning a degree, 6% to upgrade their job skills, 4% to obtain skills to get or change jobs, and 4% were enrolled for personal interest only; (2) female, African-American, and older students were more likely to be enrolled for a degree; (3) part-time students enrolled in fewer than 12 credits were as likely as full-time students to declare a degree as their major objective, but were less likely to want to transfer credits; (4) 15% of the students seeking a degree expected to achieve their goal the same semester, compared to 30% seeking to transfer credits and 40% taking classes for personal interest; and (5) recommendations for improving assessment and other student services include basing student success on internal student goals, emphasizing services for degree students, encouraging transfer students to send back credits from four-year schools to complete their two-year college degrees, and integrating student goals into future student tracking systems at the college. (KP)

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TITLE: Student Educational Goals

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Typical measures of student success are based mainly on external indicators of achievement, i.e, factors which are not related to a students internal goals for their college careers. In contrast to these external measures, this report presents student educational goals which are declared by students themselves each semester during enrollment. During the Spring 1994 semester,

- ✓ 56 percent of all students wanted to complete courses to earn a degree,
- ✓ 31 percent wanted to complete courses for transfer without earning a degree,
- ✓ 6 percent wanted to upgrade their jcb skills,
- ✓ 4 percent wanted to obtain skills to get or change jobs, and
- ✓ 4 percent were enrolled for personal interest only.

The pattern of educational goals varied by sex, age, and race: female students, African–American students, and older students were more likely to want to complete a degree. In addition, student goals varied by campus, degree status, and academic division. Recognition of these differences may help faculty, counselors, and administrators to format better educational experiences for students and may allow a better assessment of program effectiveness.

The report recommends: 1) measures of student success should be based on internal student goals; 2) the college should continue emphasizing services for degree students; 3) the college should encourage transfer students to send back credits from 4–year schools to complete their HACC degrees; and 4) student goals should be integrated into any future student tracking systems at the college.

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS

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STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS

I. INTRODUCTION

The growing mandate of accountability in student outcomes is forcing a focus on traditional outcome measures such as graduation and retention rates. However, student intentions vary tremendously; not all students who enter college intend to stay or to graduate. Certification, degree attainment, transfer of credits, skill enhancement, and personal interest are all reasons for attending HACC. Success for one student may lie in completing a single course for transfer while success for another may be completing many courses to obtain a degree. Many students who leave school without graduating actually were successful in meeting their own goals. Traditional indicators ignore this type of success as a positive outcome and may not adequately reflect HACC's ability to help students meet their goals.

This report describes student educational goals at HACC and discusses patterns in these goals. As such, the report provides a "snapshot" of student goals during one period in time. This information can be useful to administrators and faculty as they conduct program assessment and review and evaluate the effectiveness of their programs in meeting students' needs. In addition, the report also examines student expectations about goal completion and future enrollment.

II. METHODOLOGY

Enrollment forms for all students who register for classes are maintained by the Records Offices at Wildwood, Lebanon, Lancaster, and Gettysburg campuses. Along with other information, these forms ask about a student's primary educational goal, whether students expect to complete their goals, and future enrollment. Questions and responses as they appear on the enrollment forms are shown at the right.

18. WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY EDUCATIONAL GOAL IN ATTENDING HACC? (Check one)
- ☐ To complete an associate degree
- ☐ To complete courses for transfer without obtaining a degree
- ☐ To complete courses for personal interest without obtaining a degree
- ☐ To upgrade job skills
- ☐ To obtain skills to get or change jobs

19. DO YOU EXPECT TO COMPLETE YOUR GOAL AT HACC THIS SEMESTER?
a. ☐ Yes b. ☐ No

20. DO YOU EXPECT TO ENROLL AT HACC IN THE FUTURE?
a. ☐ Yes b. ☐ No
WHEN?

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Responses to these questions were collected from the enrollment forms of all students who registered for classes during the Spring 1994 semester. (The information is not currently maintained in a database, so the data was tabulated manually.) Additional demographic and background information was appended to each student's response. These included: gender, race, age, campus, degree status (i.e., degree, nondegree, guest, non–high school grad, early admission, or dual admission), academic major, and number of credits taken during the Spring semester.

It should be noted that while these questions have been on the enrollment form for a number of years, this is the first attempt to analyze the data. Personnel and resource limitations in the Research Office precluded undertaking this study at an earlier date.

Approximately 11,370 students registered for the Spring semester; however, data on goals for about 740 of these students is not included because enrollment forms were not available for these students. About 600 of these students registered by phone and were not required to fill out the forms. In addition, about 1400 students failed to complete the objective and enrollment questions on the form when they registered. Data was collected during April and May 1994 and was analyzed during June using the SPSS–PC statistical software package.

III. RESULTS

MOST STUDENTS PLAN TO COMPLETE A DEGREE OR TRANSFER COURSES

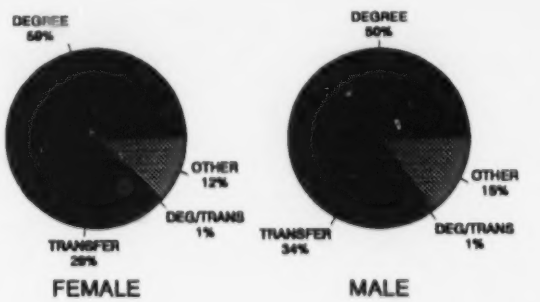
As shown in Table 1, almost 90 percent of all students intended to complete courses for a degree and/or for transfer of credits. Fifty–five percent intended to complete a degree, and over thirty percent wanted to transfer credits without obtaining a degree. About one percent intended to both complete a degree and transfer credits. (Several students checked more than one goal.) The primary educational goals for the remaining students were to complete courses for personal interest, to upgrade their skills, or to obtain skills to get or change jobs. Appendix A contains a complete listing of all student educational goals.

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS

TABLE 1 – EDUCATIONAL GOALS OF STUDENTS ENROLLED DURING SPRING 1994		
TYPE OF GOAL	NUMBER	PERCENT
Complete courses for a degree	5466	55.1%
Complete courses for transfer without degree intent	3044	30.7%
Upgrade job skills	474	4.8%
Obtain skills to get or change jobs	389	3.9%
Complete courses for personal interest without obtaining a degree	364	3.7%
Personal interest, upgrade job skills, and/or get or change jobs	99	1.0%
Complete courses for a degree *and* transfer	91	.9%
TOTAL	9927	100%

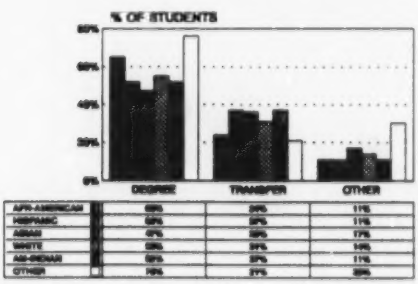
Female students were more likely to indicate they wanted to complete a degree, while males were slightly more likely to want to transfer credits. Similar proportions of male and female students were interested in only completing courses to upgrade skills or for personal interest.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS BY GENDER



FEMALE MALE

EDUCATIONAL GOAL BY RACE

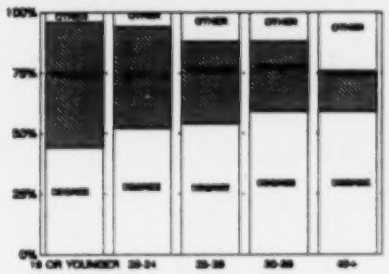


Goal types also differed by race; African–Americans were more likely to say they wanted to complete a degree compared to Hispanics, Asian–Americans and Whites, while Hispanics and Asian–Americans were more likely to complete credits for transfer.

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Age was also related to a student's educational goal. As shown at the right, older students indicated more of a preference to complete a degree, while younger students were more likely to want to transfer credits. In addition older students were also more likely to take courses for personal interest or to upgrade job skills.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS BY AGE



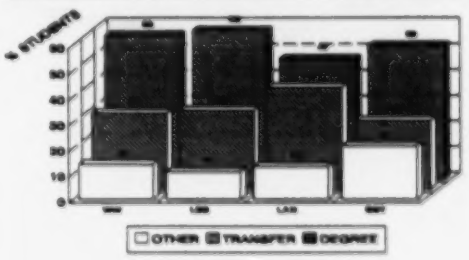
Part-time students who were enrolled in fewer than 12 credits during the Spring semester were as likely as full-time students to declare a degree as their major objective: 55 percent of both FT and PT students wanted to complete a degree. However, PT students were much less likely to want to transfer credits and more likely to state personal interest, upgrade of skills, and get or change jobs as their main goals. Students who withdrew from their classes, i.e., ended the semester with 0 credits, had similar goals as other students. About 80 percent of these students wanted either a degree or to transfer credits compared to 80 percent of PT students and 95 percent of FT students.

These differences may be helpful to faculty, counselors, and administrators in formatting educational experiences to better meet students' needs. For example, course offerings could be formatted differently if it is known that adult students are both more likely to say they want a degree and to attend evening courses. Other useful information is obtained when separate programmatic indicators are reviewed.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS DIFFER BY CAMPUS

The pattern of educational objectives varied by campus. As shown in Table 2, the goal of attaining a degree was more prevalent at the Wildwood and Lebanon campuses while students at the Lancaster campus were more likely to want to transfer credits. These campus variations may indicate the degree to which campus offerings affect student goals.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS BY CAMPUS



STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Students at Gettysburg Center showed a slightly different pattern than the three campuses: these students were almost as likely as students at Wildwood and Lebanon to want a degree, but a much higher percentage of students were enrolled for reasons other than a degree or transfer.

TABLE 2 - EDUCATIONAL GOALS BY CAMPUS

	WILDWOOD		LEBANON		LANCASTER		GETTYSBURG	
	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	%	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	%	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	%	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	%
DEGREE	4287	58%	419	58%	534	47%	226	52%
TRANSFER W/O DEGREE	2245	29%	224	31%	457	40%	118	27%
PERSONAL INTEREST	277	4%	22	3%	53	5%	12	3%
UPGRADE SKILLS	382	5%	17	2%	39	3%	36	8%
GET/CHANGE JOBS	296	4%	27	4%	43	4%	24	6%
OTHER	139	2%	14	2%	21	2%	16	3%
TOTAL	7625	100%	723	100%	1147	100%	432	100%

EDUCATIONAL GOALS DIFFER BY DEGREE STATUS, DIVISION AND PROGRAM

Students request their degree status separate from completing the goals questions on the enrollment forms. Almost two-thirds of students who were *degree* status indicated they wanted to complete a degree, while another third wanted to simply transfer credits. However, as shown in Table 3, a large number of *nondegree* students also wanted to complete a degree; one-third of the nondegree students planned to complete a degree, while another third indicated they wanted to transfer credits, and the last third indicated they were taking courses for personal interest, to upgrade job skills, or to change jobs. Dual admission students were about equally likely to complete courses for a degree as for transfer.

TABLE 3 - STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS BY STATUS

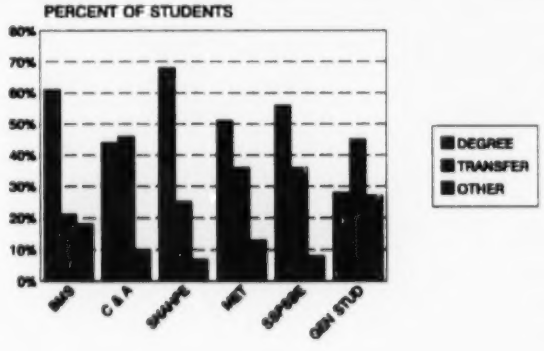
	DEGREE	NON DEGREE	DUAL ADMISSION	EARLY ADMISSION	OTHER	TOTAL
GOAL	Number %	Number %	Number %	Number %	Number %	Number
Degree	4436 (64%)	939 (35%)	64 (49%)	2 (6%)	25 (46%)	5466
Transfer w/o degree	2039 (29%)	901 (33%)	60 (46%)	28 (78%)	16 (30%)	3044
Personal Interest	96 (1%)	261 (10%)	1 (1%)	5 (14%)	1 (2%)	364
Upgrade Skills	136 (2%)	330 (12%)	2 (2%)	—	6 (11%)	474
Get/Change Jobs	180 (3%)	203 (8%)	1 (1%)	—	5 (9%)	389
Degree & Transfer	74 (1%)	14 (1%)	3 (2%)	—	—	91
Pers Int/Upgrade Skills/Get/Change Job	25 (1%)	72 (3%)	—	1 (3%)	1 (2%)	99
TOTAL	6986 (100%)	2720 (100%)	131 (100%)	36 (100%)	54 (100%)	9927

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS

The rate at which students wanted to obtain degrees also varied by the type of program students were pursuing. Almost half of all students in certificate programs indicated they were working toward a degree, while only 10 percent said they planned to transfer the credits. Overall, students in transfer degree programs were evenly split between degrees and transfer of credits, with few indicating other educational goals. Students in career degree programs were more likely to be working towards a degree: 58 percent said they planned to complete a degree, and 22 percent were planning to transfer without completing a degree. Over 70 percent of students in non grad programs planned to obtain a degree, while 20 percent planned to transfer the credits. Diploma students were most likely to view their coursework as a means to upgrade their job skills or for employment reasons.

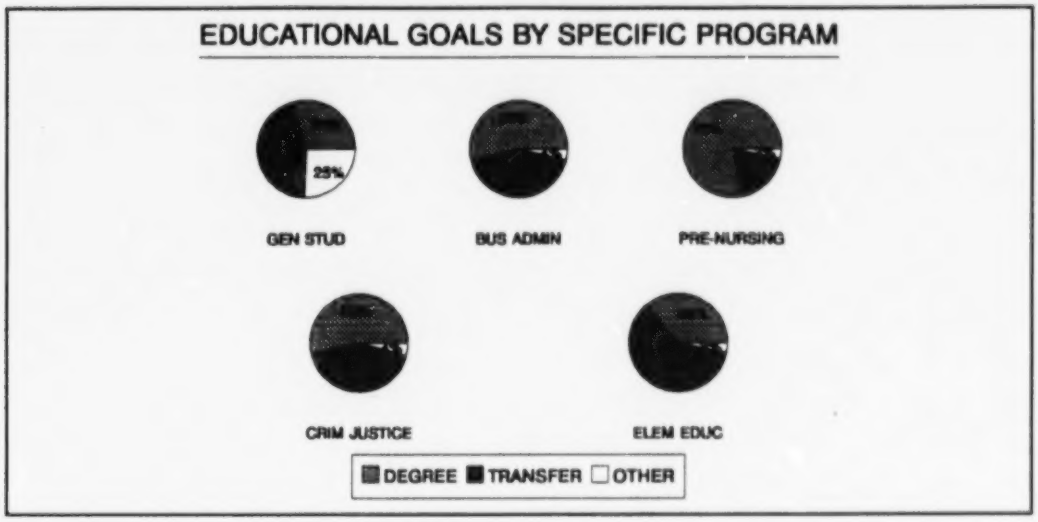
The results of this study indicate that the college divisions are servicing various needs for students. As shown at the right, students in the BMS and SNAHPE divisions indicate more preference for a degree, while students in C&A and SSPSBE are more likely to take courses for transfer without degree acquisition. This finding is also supported by the followup surveys of HACC graduates. BMS and SNAHPE tend to be more career oriented while C&A and SSPSBE students have a higher percentage of transfer students.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS BY DIVISION



Educational goals also vary across programs. For instance, goals for students in the five largest programs vary greatly as shown in the graph on the following page. As can be expected, only 29 percent of students in General Studies planned to complete a degree, but over half of all students in Business Administration and Criminal Justice and three-quarters of students in Pre-Nursing planned to complete degrees. The educational goals for the 20 most popular programs are shown in Appendix B.

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS



Recognition of these differences by program may allow a better assessment of program effectiveness. Student educational goals will probably be incorporated in the student tracking system which is planned to be completed in the future. This will allow faculty, advisors, and administrators to maintain a longitudinal record of student objectives and to monitor whether students are achieving their goals. Analysis of this type of data could indicate potential barriers to student success.

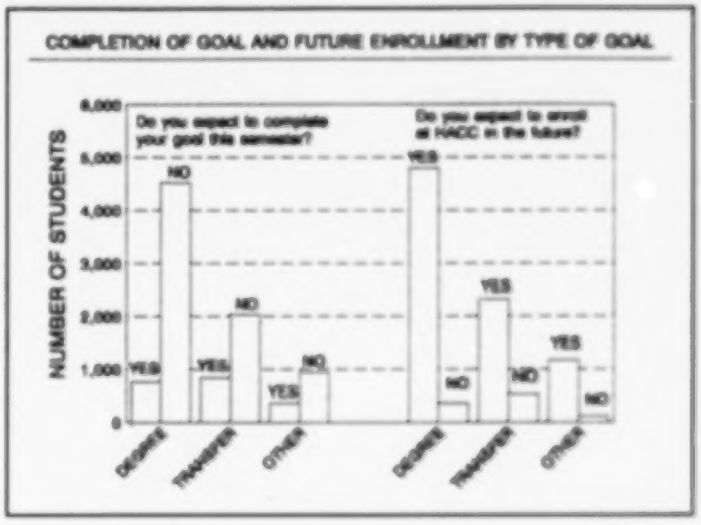
MOST STUDENTS DID NOT EXPECT TO COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS DURING SPRING SEMESTER

In addition to questions about their educational goals, students were asked whether they expected to complete their goals. Almost 80 percent of all students did not expect to complete their educational goal during the Spring semester; however, this pattern varied according to the goal which a student was working towards. For instance, 15 percent of students who were working towards a degree expected to complete their goal, but 30 percent of students wanting to transfer credits and 40 percent of students taking classes for personal interest expected to complete their goal. Twenty percent of persons taking courses to get or change jobs and 26 percent wishing to upgrade their skills expected to complete their goals.

Question #20 on the enrollment form also asks students when they expect to enroll in the future.

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Only 8,025 students responded to the question. Of these, about half (3,449) said they would enroll in the Summer, 40 percent said they would enroll in the Fall, 4 percent said they would enroll in the Spring, 9 percent said they would enroll at some point in the future, and 10 percent said they would enroll at some combination of future semesters (e.g., Summer and Fall, Fall and Spring, etc.).


COMPLETION OF GOAL AND FUTURE ENROLLMENT BY TYPE OF GOAL
NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Do you expect to complete your goal this semester?
Do you expect to enroll at HACC in the future?
NO
YES
DEGREE
TRANSFER
OTHER

Of those students who did expect to complete their goal during the summer session, slightly over half said they still expected to enroll at some time in the future. Of students who did not expect to complete their goal, most (98%) said they planned to enroll in the future. The persons most likely to enroll were students working towards a degree who did not expect to complete during Spring semester: over 90 percent of these students planned to enroll in the future.

Currently, student responses about their future enrollment are not tabulated from the enrollment forms. If collected and analyzed, this type of data could provide a sound basis for enrollment projections for returning students. One method might involve tracking student expectations about enrollment and comparing it to actual future enrollment. This could provide a rate of recurrence for returning students and, used in conjunction with projections for first-time student enrollment, may allow better projections of future enrollment numbers.

IV. RESEARCH OFFICE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In contrast to typical measures of student outcomes such as graduation or retention rates, measurements of student success which are based on students' own educational objectives are better indicators of institutional effectiveness in meeting student needs. Half of all HACC students enrolled during Spring 1994 planned to complete a degree, but almost one-third of all students simply wanted to transfer credits without obtaining a degree, while the remainder were completing courses for personal interest or skill enrichment. Traditional outcome measures fail to recognize these latter students as successes, even though students may have met their own goals.

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS

This study found that the pattern of educational goals varied for students by campus, division, and degree status and by the type of program in which students were enrolled. For instance, over 70 percent of students in non grad programs planned to obtain a degree, compared to 60 percent of students in career degree programs, and 50 percent of students in transfer degree programs. Administrative and faculty recognition and further examination of the educational goal patterns discussed in this report may lead to a better student experience at HACC.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. For assessment purposes, graduation and retention rates are not appropriate measures of student success. Since about half of all students enrolled during the Spring semester indicated they were not working towards a degree and since individual programs have large numbers of students who do not intend to complete a degree, indicators which are based on graduation rates dismiss student intentions. Measures of effectiveness should be constructed which account for all student objectives.

2. The issue of all student objectives is important, but the data in this study indicate a larger combined number of students in degree status by formal application and/or by "goal" than might be expected. Community college literature points to the importance of considering all types of goals, but Table 1 of this report indicates that 5,466 of the 9,922 (55.1%) students in the study think the degree is important, although only 4,436 (Table 3) have formally declared the degree their "status" at the college. The high number of students in a degree mode indicate that the college should continue its traditional emphasis of services for these students.

3. The college should consider augmenting its current efforts to encourage transfer students to send back credits from four year institutions so that the HACC degree can be awarded. Currently, the actual number of degrees awarded does not match the number of students in a transfer mode who say the degree is their goal.

4. Many students who were in a nondegree status indicated they wanted to complete a degree (Table 3). It is important for the college to more actively talk to these students because degree status affects financial aid and state stipend funding. Students in a career program mode should be encouraged to switch to degree status.

5. Student educational objectives should be integrated into any future student tracking system. Once the tracking system is in place, student objectives should be monitored for assessment purposes.

6. All students should be required to complete all questions on the enrollment forms.

APPENDIX A
EDUCATIONAL GOALS OF STUDENTS ENROLLED DURING SPRING 1994

PRIMARY EDUCATIONAL GOALS (SPRING 1994)			
TYPE OF GOAL	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	%	VALID %
DEGREE – To complete an associate degree	5352	47.1	53.9
TRANSFER – To complete courses for transfer without obtaining a degree	3018	26.5	30.4
PERSONAL INTEREST – To compete courses for personal interest without obtaining a degree	364	3.2	3.7
UPGRADE SKILLS – To upgrade job skills	474	4.2	4.8
OBTAIN SKILLS – To obtain skills to get or change jobs	389	3.4	3.9
DEGREE AND TRANSFER	89	0.8	0.9
DEGREE AND OBTAIN SKILLS	52	0.5	0.5
PERSONAL INTEREST AND OBTAIN SKILLS	8	0.1	0.1
UPGRADE SKILLS AND OBTAIN SKILLS	49	0.4	0.5
PERSONAL INTEREST, UPGRADE SKILLS, AND OBTAIN SKILLS	9	0.1	0.1
DEGREE AND UPGRADE SKILLS	37	0.3	0.4
DEGREE, TRANSFER, AND UPGRADE SKILLS	2	0.0	0.0
TRANSFER AND OBTAIN SKILLS	7	0.1	0.1
TRANSFER, UPGRADE SKILLS, AND OBTAIN SKILLS	3	0.0	0.0
DEGREE, UPGRADE SKILLS, AND OBTAIN SKILLS	17	0.2	0.2
TRANSFER AND UPGRADE SKILLS	7	0.1	0.1
DEGREE AND PERSONAL INTEREST	5	0.0	0.1
PERSONAL INTEREST AND UPGRADE SKILLS	33	0.3	0.3
TRANSFER AND PERSONAL INTEREST	9	0.1	0.1
DEGREE, PERSONAL INTEREST, AND UPGRADE SKILLS	3	0.0	0.0
MISSING	1443	12.7	MISSING
TOTAL	11370	100.0	100.0

APPENDIX B
STUDENT EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES FOR THE 20 MOST POPULAR PROGRAMS

STUDENT EDUCATIONAL GOALS BY SELECTED PROGRAMS							
		DEGREE		TRANSFER W/O DEGREE		OTHER	
CURR	TITLE	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
102	Business Administration	484	53.4	387	42.7	35	3.9
146	Accounting	171	64.3	28	10.5	67	25.2
150	Business Studies	110	68.3	12	7.5	39	24.2
151	Business Management	239	70.3	30	8.8	71	20.9
209	LA – Communication and the Arts	86	44.8	88	45.8	18	9.4
309	LA – Life Science	105	33.8	186	59.8	20	6.4
368	Nursing	226	97.8	4	1.7	1	0.4
370	Pre–Nursing	496	78.1	117	18.4	22	3.5
378	Pre–Radiologic Technology	119	86.2	17	12.3	2	1.5
399	General Studies SNAHPE	57	40.1	63	44.4	22	15.5
411	Pre–Engineering	29	25.4	76	66.7	9	7.9
506	Social Services	56	50.5	52	46.9	3	2.7
509	LA – Social Science	138	49.3	131	46.8	11	3.9
510	Elementary Education K–6	125	35.8	212	60.7	12	3.4
515	LA – Psychology	80	38.3	119	56.9	10	4.8
550	Education Early Childhood	146	81.6	26	14.5	7	3.9
555	Human Services	101	76.5	18	13.6	13	9.9
570	Legal Assistant	210	89.4	10	4.3	15	6.4
605	Criminal Justice	197	53.1	158	42.6	16	4.3
766	General Studies	312	29.1	491	45.8	270	25.2